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ABSTRACT

This paper presents information on isolated children and describes a study being undertaken to examine the role of isolation in reported cases of child abuse and neglect. The effects of extreme isolation on language and psychological development are emphasized. The importance of early socialization is seen in relation to normal development. Ancient and medieval studies in which children were isolated to discover an instinctive language are described in the text and appendix. Reports of two modern children who were isolated from birth are also presented. In the study described in this paper, 51 cases of child abuse and neglect recently reported in the United Kingdom were examined. In the cases selected for review, isolation was not cited as a major factor, so that its role as a contributing factor in child abuse could be assessed. Results indicate that, although isolation was not seen as worthy of inclusion in legal charges, it appears to be a significant factor in all stages of case histories. The case of a neglected boy is reconstructed, and developmental damage produced by isolation is discussed. (SB)

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ISOLATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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I INTRODUCTION

The evidence reported here arises from a study being undertaken to examine the following aspects:

1. The effects of extreme isolation on the language and psychological development of children.
2. A re-assessment of certain cases of extreme neglect in order to place into context the technique of isolating (or threatening to isolate) children as a punishment.
3. A survey of contemporary views about leaving children on their own in the house in the day, evening and/or at weekends - views about the ages of children old enough to be responsible, the impact of the law, the role of certain public and charitable institutions in this area of child neglect.

This paper reports evidence about isolation in the contexts of certain cases of violence against children. Isolation as a factor in cases of violence appears to be important, particularly as it relates to the development of the child's communicative competence and the unfolding and development of the personality of the child in the context of close human contact, interaction and affection.

However, it is clear from an examination of only a very few cases of children brought up in conditions of isolation, that some people in charge of children do not believe that children need to socialise; they do not believe that children need to internalise the norms, values, attitudes, customs and skills of their culture as they socialise, but the evidence is overwhelming: the child that is not socialised through complex interactions with other human beings within a particular sociocultural environment is unlikely to develop his own personality and will suffer from untapped ability and potential.

The development of a distinctive personality is an ongoing process, continuing throughout life. The young child learns the difference between various other people by names, e g "daddy", "mummy", and "baby." Initially, any man is a "daddy", and any woman a "mummy", but eventually the child moves from names which distinguish a status, to specific

names which identify individuals, including himself. The "I" as the actor has to be learned by children. This is one of the signs that the child is becoming aware of himself as a distinct human being, conscious of self. As social experiences accumulate year after year, one's image of the kind of person one is - an image of self - emerges. An individual's formation of his self-image is perhaps one of the most important processes in personality development.

A distinction between the personalities of humans and animals is the inclusion of self-image in the human personality. Self-image arises through social interaction with other human beings. It is only through interaction that language is acquired, effectively linking a person to statuses, conventionalized gestures, and symbolic human goals and purposes. This ability to communicate with others through linguistic symbols sharply distinguishes man from other animals.

Thus, a human being deprived from birth of all communication with other humans, would probably possess no language skills; would probably eat by bringing his mouth directly to his food instead of conveying it to his mouth with his hands or utensils; would probably have no concept of mother, no statuses, no beliefs; would probably possess a rudimentary personality, and would not recognize the rights of others or their expectations of him. The newborn infant deprived of an adequate social environment, human interaction, and affectionate acceptance will in all likelihood have an impaired personality; at an age much earlier than the life expectancy, the child might die of malnutrition, disease, or accident.

II ISOLATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Empirical studies to determine how children learn to speak date back to early history. It is reported that Emperor Frederick II conducted an experiment in which babies were deliberately subjected to institution-like experiences, being raised by nurses and foster mothers who were not permitted to speak to them. The Emperor's purpose for such drastic action was to find out which language the children would instinctively speak. The unforeseen outcome of his experiment was that the children died. Appendix I contains other reports of similar 'experiments' to find out 'the original language.'

There have been a few reports in the past of children who, for one reason or another, were purportedly raised under conditions of substantial isolation from group life. The problem remains, when trying to ascertain the specific effects of isolation on normal development, that while abandoned infants and small children have been found from time to time, there is no conclusive way of determining the actual length of time during which they were abandoned, or whether they were "normal" at the time of abandonment.

There are many views about language acquisition and about the role(s) of language in the development of children, but despite this wide range of views there is unanimity on one aspect. Neither the empiricist who believes with Locke that we are born with a mental 'tabula rasa' with all language the result of 'experience', nor the rationalist who supports the Descartian position of a complex, highly specific, innate language mechanism denies that certain environmental conditions are necessary for the acquisition of a language and for socialising to take place. There is no need to replicate the apochryphal experiments conducted by Psammeticus in the 5th century B C, or that of King James IV of Scotland to know that children will not learn any language when deprived of all linguistic input, nor will they grow up as normal beings. The cases of children reared in environments of extreme social isolation attest to this.

Ten such children are mentioned by Linneaus in his System of Nature published in 1735, and are included by him under the division of Homo Sapiens in the sub-division of Homo Ferus (Wild Man). One of the defining characteristics of Homo Ferus, according to Linneaus, was his inability to speak. All the cases of isolated children reported in the literature since his time show this to be a correct observation.

In the 18th century, the interest in such cases was stimulated by the struggle between the 'geneticists' and the 'environmentalists', and figured sharply in the debate over the theory of innate ideas. The different views continue to be debated today in somewhat different forms (see Skinner, Chomsky, Lenneberg etc.).

III 'WOLF CHILDREN'

The most dramatic cases of children reared under severe conditions of social isolation and stimulus deprivation are those described as 'wild' or 'feral' or 'wolf' children who have reportedly been reared with wild

animals or have lived alone in the wilderness. Two such children, Amala and Kamala, found in 1920, were supposedly reared by wolves. A more celebrated case is that of Victor, the 'Wild Boy of Aveyron', discovered in 1798. The study of Victor was limited by the methods available at the end of the 18th century, as well as by a limited understanding of the nature of language. The largely anecdotal and unscientific account of these early cases has provided useful insights into language acquisition, as well as other areas social, perceptual and cognitive developments.

Two classic cases of 'Feral children' - children brought up in conditions of extreme isolation - are reported by K Davis (discussed in Rogers 1975) who studied the effects of extreme isolation in Anna and Isabelle. When they were found, they were existing in severely isolated conditions. Davis' observations were made on the children's activities after they had been discovered and placed in a socially stimulating environment.

Anna was confined to a second floor attic-like room for almost all of her first six years of life. She was the second illegitimate child of a young mentally subnormal woman; Anna was confined in the upstairs room in deference to her grandfather's total disapproval of this new evidence of his daughter's indiscretions, which had produced the illegitimate Anna. The mother gave practically no care to Anna, feeding her nothing but cow's milk.

Anna was finally discovered at the age of almost six, and removed from her grandfather's house. Anna's years of confinement had left their toll - she was an extremely undernourished, apathetic, and animal-like creature who could neither talk, walk, nor do anything that showed normal intelligence. Taken first to a country home, then to a foster home, and finally to a private home for retarded children, she did make some progress. After almost two years, she had learned to walk, to feed herself, to understand simple commands, to be fairly neat, and to remember the people with whom she came into daily contact. However, Anna was still unable to speak intelligibly: her babblings resembled those of a normal one-year-old child. During the following two years, toilet habits were established, she learned to dress herself except for fastening her clothes, and finally (at about age ten) Anna began to develop speech patterns on a two-year-old's level. Unfortunately, she died at the age of ten-and-a-half of hemorrhagic jaundice.

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The story of Isabelle's life is quite different from that of Anna's. Isabelle was an illegitimate child who (like Anna) had been confined to isolation because of her illegitimacy. In this case, however, the child was not completely alone during her confinement. For her first six-and-a-half years, Isabelle was locked in a dark room with her deaf-mute mother. When found, her physical condition was somewhat better than Anna's but Isabelle was a wan and thin child with legs badly bowed from a rachitic condition caused by improper nourishment and lack of sunshine. She was as terrified of strangers as is a wild animal just after capture, and she was especially fearful of men. At first, the authorities thought Isabelle was either feebleminded or deaf; when it was established that she was neither, a systematic and skillful language training program was begun.

Her first gradual responses to tutelage accelerated into rapid progress through the learning stages usually attained between one and six years of age. After one year of effort, Isabelle could write, count up to twenty, add up to ten, and give a simple summary of a story which had been read to her. After completing a year-and-a-half of training, the following was written as part of a report about Isabelle's progress:

(1) Vocabulary between 1,500 and 2,000 words;

(2) Questions asked by Isabelle: Why do crayons break? Why does the hand move around the clock? Why does the paste come out if one upsets the jar? Do you go to Miss Mason's school at the university? Are you going to church tomorrow? Does your dog sleep in your bed? What did Miss Mason say when you told her I cleaned my classroom?

By the age of eight-and-a-half, Isabelle had made remarkable progress to the point where her I Q reached a normal level. Appropriate surgery had corrected her leg deformity, and she showed few signs of her periods of isolation. Eventually, Isabelle entered a local school and made normal progress while exhibiting bright, energetic, and cheerful behaviour.

How to explain the different outcomes of these two cases - cases that seemed so similar upon discovery? Davis himself devotes much time to giving three explanations of the different ends of the two children. One explanation might be that Anna had inherited limitations on her developmental capacities, while Isabelle did not have genetically linked limitations on her capacities. Anna's mother had been tested for the level of her intelligence,

and though she had completed the eighth grade, she had an I Q of 50. A second explanation might be that by being locked in a room with her mother, Isabelle developed closer contacts with her, enabling Isabelle to respond to the specialised training when it was finally provided. A third explanation is that the specialized speech training given to Isabelle was the primary reason for her greater progress and eventual survival.

Both of Davis' case studies demonstrate the significance of human interaction and other social contacts for the development of personality. When children are denied human interaction for prolonged periods, their personality fails to develop normally.

Until 1974 there were no systematic and scientific studies of the effects of very long-term isolation in childhood. In 1974 there was first published reports about Genie who was found at the age of 13 years 7 months in Los Angeles. She had been isolated from the age of 20 months. The case of Genie assumes an important place in this study because of the unique amount of time that she was isolated, and because, from the time she emerged from isolation, a team of psychologists, psychiatrists, neurologists, and linguists have been working with her.

IV THE PRESENT STUDY

I have been examining a large number of cases brought to the courts in the United Kingdom in which there have been parents, guardians and those in long-term charge of children found guilty of: -

(1) gross neglect (24 cases)
(2) manslaughter (3 cases)
(3) actual bodily harm (24 cases)

In total the cases I have examined number 51. This may seem to be a small number in the light of the size of the problem as shown in the 1975 N S P C C Annual Report, which lists the case list of the society. The N S P C C opened, for example, 18,125 new cases in 1974-75, but very few cases ever came to court; they list in the same period only 19 prosecuted cases.

I have deliberately concentrated on cases other than those which were concerned with children being left alone (of which the N S P C C list 2,862 in 1974-75). I looked at cases where there were other major factors so that I could review the contributory factor of children being left alone.

V THE EVIDENCE CONCERNING ISOLATION

The evidence is overwhelming: in these 51 cases where enforced isolation for long periods of time was not seen by the prosecuting authority as worthy of inclusion on the list of charges, such isolation appears to be a significant factor in all stages of the case history.

(1) 24 Cases of Gross Neglect

(a) 18 cases out of 24 report that child left alone in the day for long periods while mother out at work or shopping. Children aged from 1 week upwards.

(b) 21 cases report that child left at home on their own for evenings. 12 cases report child left on their own every evening for weeks at a stretch.

(c) 9 cases report that children aged from 3½ - 14 left on their own for weekends. 2 cases of a child aged below 4 left on their own for weekends.

(d) 18 cases report that long periods of isolation (periods of more than 24 hours) used as a means of punishment.
The threat of long periods of isolation used in all 24 cases.

(2) 3 Cases of Manslaughter

(a) In all 3 cases there is a similar history of the child being left by itself for very long periods in the day and evening, together with evidence that the child was threatened with more locking away if he/she did not behave or be quiet.

(3) 24 Cases of Actual Bodily Harm

(a) 13 cases report child left alone in the day for long periods. Children aged from 2 months upward.

(b) All cases report child left at home in evenings. 14 cases report child left on their own every evening for weeks at a stretch.

(c) 19 cases report children aged from 2½ upwards left on their own for weekends. 7 cases of a child below 3 left on their own at weekends.

(d) 15 cases report that long periods of isolation (periods of more than 24 hours) used as a means of punishment. The threat of long periods of isolation used in 18 cases.

VI DISCUSSION

The cases which form part of this study were not seen by the authorities as cases of children left on their own, but in each category enforced isolation forms a significant factor in a majority of cases. Given that our state of knowledge is incomplete concerning the effects of isolation it is nevertheless possible to reconstruct a typical case of gross neglect in which isolation appears as an important factor in the future outcome of the case.

VII A RECONSTRUCTION OF A CASE OF GROSS NEGLECT

Andrew is the only child of Mr and Mrs B. He is left for long periods alone in his carry-cot from birth while his mother goes out shopping. When he is 3 months old Mrs B gets a job working on a shift from 4 in the afternoon until 10 at night. Mr B does not come home from work until 5 30 p m. Andrew is left on his own from 4 to 5 30 every evening. Mr B, now that his wife is working, goes out most evenings to the pub and picks his wife up when she finishes at the factory.

At age of 1 year Andrew is still spending many hours in his cot other than when he is sleeping. The pattern established when he was three months is now set. As a boy, he does not cry very much but plays almost silently in his cot, where he is put whenever he is left on his own.

At age 1½ years Mrs B begins to work full-time in the day. Andrew around this time develops an aversion to his cot and fights against being put in it at all. Mrs B allows him to stay in their living room in the day and he sleeps on the chairs at night. Andrew now spends his days on his own in a room with an open electric fire, electric power points at his level, and a television set which is sometimes left on all day. His parents go out in the evenings, leaving Andrew asleep on a chair in the living room with the television on.

At age 2½ neighbours report the parents who are cautioned and aided by a voluntary body. Mrs B carries on her job.

VIII THE EFFECTS OF EXTREME ISOLATION ON ANDREW

At age 3 Andrew barely spoke. He babbled a little but clearly did not understand the need to communicate with other people. He was a very poor walker and his preferred activity was lying on the floor moving a toy car backwards and forwards within the reach of his arm. He was not curious about his environment and did not react to noises being made by him although he appeared not to be deaf when tested. He did not react to other people when he was seen, he stayed lying on the floor; only very rarely did he look up to see what was going on around him.

IX ISOLATION AS AN ASPECT OF VIOLENCE IN THE FAMILY

In the 51 cases which form the basis of this present study, isolation plays an important part in 47 of them. Not all the cases are ones of violence against children in so far as violence is judged to be physical violence producing physical injuries, but the children suffer the injury to their development, their personality and their potential by being forced into isolation. Thus isolation and the threat of isolation may be seen as a form of violation of the child and thus it must be as an aspect of violence in the family that it is studied. This paper presents very early evidence in this area and as the project continues it is hoped to present the material gained in a more scientific way. But we are left with the view that there is a vicious circle in considering the effects of children who have been isolated. After long periods of isolation, the child becomes disoriented and 'anti-social', very inward turned and non-communicative. He will not have learned how to play with other children and will probably experience moderate to severe temper tantrums. He will be or become a difficult child, who can only be dealt with by keeping him away from other children, other adults. Thus he is kept isolated which will only make him worse. In this way, early isolation may be seen as an important contributory factor in many cases of child abuse and as such needs considerably more study.

X PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

The existing law protects children below a certain age from being left on their own. But, as in so many examples of child abuse, the existence of a law is in itself no answer. There needs to be positive discrimination in order to keep mothers at home with their children. In France and elsewhere it is possible for mothers to be paid a salary for the first two years of their children to enable them to stay at home with them, to let the

mothers feel that they are contributing to the family income and to give them a feeling of worth and importance which the community would give them with a salary.

REFERENCES

Sinclair Rogers (1975) Children and Language Oxford University Press.

APPENDIX I: SOME EXPERIMENTAL CASES

In the 5th century B C Herodotus reported that the Egyptian Pharoah Psammeticus (664-610 B C) sought to determine the most primitive 'natural' language by placing two infants in an isolated mountain hut to be cared for by a servant who was cautioned not to speak in their presence on pain of death. According to Herodotus, the first word uttered was 'bekos' the Phrygian word for 'bread' convincing the Pharoah that this was the original language.

Salimbene described Frederick II's experiment of the thirteenth century as follows:

> He wanted to find out what kind of speech and what manner of speech children would have when they grew up if they spoke to no one beforehand.
> So he bade foster mothers and nurses to suckle the children, to bathe and wash them, but in no way to prattle with them, or to speak to them, for he wanted to learn whether they would speak the Hebrew language, which was the oldest, or Greek, or Latin, or Arabic, or perhaps the language of their parents, of whom they had been born. But he laboured in vain because the children all died. For they could not live without the petting and joyful faces and loving words of their foster mothers.
> And so the songs are called "swaddling songs" which a woman sings while she is rocking the cradle, to put a child to sleep, and without them a child sleeps badly and has no rest.

James IV of Scotland (1473 - 1513) is reported to have attempted the same experiment. The Scottish children, however, were said by John to "spak very guid Ebrew".

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